

SMILE NEWS

They call him Don Alex



Don Alex, with son César, spreads word of Operation Smile's work in Honduras.

In the Honduran province of Olancho, when Alex Guerrero and his wife Adilia gave birth to their fourth child César, something was terribly wrong. The doctor told Alex that his son was born with deformities, a cleft lip and cleft palate – his advice was to avoid letting people see the baby as it would be traumatic.

"I felt my world falling apart," said Alex. The doctors only told them the problem could be solved by surgery, but had no information on where to go.

"It was very difficult feeding Cesar, his glucose levels got very low, we just could not feed him. He lost mobility, yet no one could tell us what to do," says Alex, his eyes welling up with tears from the memory. For eight months, Alex and Adilia desperately searched for help. One Honduran clinic asked for 280,000 lempiras (£11,000) for the

cleft lip and cleft palate surgeries – money they didn't have.

One doctor mentioned Operation Smile, but told him they might be charged for surgery. Alex and his wife decided to try Operation Smile as a last resort. "As I went through the gates to the Operation Smile centre in Tegucigalpa, it was like seeing light at the end of a tunnel,



Cesar was born with a cleft lip and cleft palate.

staff were kind and respectful."

César received surgery a few weeks later — it didn't cost a single lempira. "At that moment, I made a promise, that there will not be one single person in Olancho, living with an untreated cleft lip or cleft palate. I don't want anybody to go through what we have."

Alex and his family now spend all their time helping others receive care they desperately need. Everyone he meets calls him Don Alex, conveying their respect for him and his dedication.

In his role as assistant to the Health Minister of the region, Alex has provided all 230 health clinics with information about Operation Smile. He makes radio announcements and television appearances to reach every corner of Olancho – an area of Honduras home to more than 700,000 people. Alex visits families, bringing César to show them there is hope.

The majority of people Alex helps live in extreme poverty. Many earn £2 daily, only eating one meal a day. They do not have the money to pay for the bus to the closest clinic, let alone a bus to the closest hospital in a distant city.

Alex has enabled numerous families to receive the help they need and he encourages others to spread the word about how Operation Smile helps children with cleft conditions.

Inspired by his work, seven parents of former Operation Smile patients became the first patient advocates for a new 'Accompaniment Programme'. Working as a link between our centre in Tegucigalpa and their communities – they share information, facilitate transportation and give instructions for follow up.

"If I could look into the future, I see zero people suffering from cleft lip or cleft palate in the whole country," he says. "That is our mission and I am confident we can fulfil it."

Focus on Malawi

When a child is born with a cleft condition in Malawi, it is a matter of life and death. Many parents do not know where to get help — they do not know how to breastfeed or take care of their child with a cleft condition. They are forced to choose which of their children gets food; which child gets to grow stronger and go to school; which child gets to survive.

Those who do survive may suffer difficulty eating or speaking and are vulnerable to negative attitudes, marginalisation and social stigma. This almost always prevents children from attending school or envisioning an independent future when their fundamental rights such as education and health are compromised. The issues associated with poverty in Malawi, including malnutrition, lack of education and limited access to healthcare, are exacerbated and compounded for children living with a cleft condition.

Malawi is one of Operation Smile's newest countries of activity. The first medical mission was held in the country in 2012 and since then we have held 7 missions, screened 1,570 patients and provided surgery for 984 children and adults living with a cleft condition. We estimate that globally there are likely 500,000 people living with an unrepaired cleft lip and/or palate. In Malawi alone, we estimate that there are more than 2,400 people with an unrepaired cleft condition.

Malawi has a critical shortage of medical professionals and as such, is unable to provide these cleft patients with the surgery and care they need. The country has a population of more than 17 million that is served by only 61 surgeons, 11 anaesthetists, and 7 obstetricians.

Operation Smile is working to build knowledge and skills within the medical profession, to grow Malawi's capacity to take care of children with cleft conditions.



MALAWI

Country Facts

Population: 17,964,697
Capital: Lilongwe
Languages: English, Chichewa, Chinyanja
GDP per Capita: \$1,200
Population below poverty line: 53%
Life Expectancy: 60 years

Cleft condition data

Number of newborns with cleft/year: 700
Estimated backlog: 2,472
Number of cleft surgeons: 4

Case Study – Semitale's Story:

Semitale suffered from severe social discrimination. His peers shunned him and his mother Violet, did not send him to school knowing that he would be ridiculed and mocked there as well as in his own village.

Following Semitale's surgery, we took Violet into the recovery room. She walked past Semitale to another patient as she did not recognise her own son. We held her hand and walked her back to Semitale who lay in the adjacent bed. In that moment she turned to us and gave two thumbs up with the widest smile!





Last Autumn I joined the team travelling to Malawi for my very first mission with Operation Smile. Nothing could prepare me for when I first saw patients arriving at the hospital. I felt a mixture of sympathy and shock at the continuous flow of people arriving for registration. I saw a lot of tired patients and underweight children. I joined some adults who were alone, recognising

this would be daunting for them.

It was amazing to witness surgeries performed by our surgical teams. I broke down into tears upon seeing a 6 month old baby receiving surgery, I watched in amazement as the surgeon meticulously reconstructed the baby's lip and nose in just two hours. Surgical teams from Malawi, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, US and UK worked all day, into the night through power cuts to complete 125 surgeries in 4 days!

A local school was used as accommodation for patients and families. Here we held feeding and speech development workshops which were well attended and appreciated. The aim was to educate parents to become teachers for their communities.

I feel extremely proud to be part of the Operation Smile team and to witness how trusted we are as we provide safe reconstructive surgery for cleft lip and cleft palate conditions.

Our supporters may remember that Nowell who featured in our Autumn Appeal last year with his twin brother, was too sick to receive surgery on the last mission in Zomba, Malawi. He was given antibiotics, and his mother was assured that as long as he was healthy enough he would receive surgery on the next mission.

We were all so overjoyed to hear from Sarah that Nowell had received surgery and he could now join his twin brother Noah with his new smile and share hopes for a brighter future!

"He is going to be a beautiful boy"

Greth Liseth and her children live in an impoverished area of Olancho, Honduras. Greth was devastated when her son, Erick Manuel, was born. She had never seen a cleft lip or cleft palate before; nobody could explain why her Manuelito was born that way. She couldn't breastfeed him and felt helpless.

Greth wakes up at 5 a.m. every morning to prepare breakfast for her children before they go to school. She then goes to work as a cook. Her oldest daughter, 14 years old, stays home to take care of Manuelito. Greth only earns 1,000 lempiras (£40) each month, it is never enough even to buy groceries, she borrows money to survive.

When Manuelito was born, she felt overwhelmingly desperate and lonely. Superstitious people blamed her for Manuelito's condition, saying she had watched too many lunar eclipses. One woman told her that her son was a monster and his deformities were her fault. "Doctors said not to worry as they know a person that could help," Greth said. **"His name is Don Alex Guerrero, they gave me his number."**

Greth's family is one of the families that Don Alex and his team promised to support. "I called Don Alex from the hospital and he came and found me straight away" Greth said. "I didn't know how to feed my son. Don Alex told me to stay there. He left and came back with formula, drove me home and taught me how to feed my son."

Don Alex also invited her to his house to meet his son César, explaining that he too was born with the same condition. "I was so happy when I met his child because he looks normal, I know that with the will of God, my son is going to be beautiful and healthy."

Greth arrived to the Operation Smile medical mission in Tegucigalpa's Hospital San Felipe with the hope that her son would receive surgery. Don Alex brought her and 18 other children and family members there.



"He is going to be a beautiful boy," says Erick Manuel's mother.

The staff at the centre provided Greth with instructions and formula that her son needed to gain weight for the surgery.

Greth could have neither afforded the bus ride to the city, nor would she have dared to go there alone without the help of Don Alex. Without him, she would not have found Operation Smile Honduras and Manuelito would not have received one of the 150 surgeries performed during the medical mission. Greth feels confident about her son's future.

"He is going to be a beautiful boy," she said. "I want to thank Operation Smile, because if it wasn't for them, my child wouldn't be able to have surgery, now everything is going to be fine and I want to thank the staff and Don Alex for all their support."

You make the difference

Just £150
and a 45 minute
operation can
change a
child's life



Making a Will

"I've been meaning to make a will, but...."

How often do we say this to ourselves, to our family and friends?

If you haven't yet made your will, you are not alone, more than 60% of adults in the UK have no will. Why don't you start the New Year by making a will so that you can choose what happens to your property and money?

If you are approaching a particular milestone or event in your life you should consider making a will or amending an existing one. For example events such as – marriage, birth, buying a house, divorce, inheritance, or losing a loved one, will impact your financial circumstances.

Making a will isn't difficult just contact a local solicitor and if you intend to leave a gift to Operation Smile in your will we would love to hear from you. Please contact our legacy officer Pippa Fawcett, in confidence, for more information.

Pippa.fawcett@operationsmile.org

Nowell and his grandma return to Zomba for his life changing surgery.



This newsletter costs just 10p to print. Please share with friends and family, or leave it at your doctor's surgery for others to read.



YES! I'll make a regular donation to help change a child's life

I would like to make a regular monthly donation of:

£5 £7.50 £12.50 My choice £

A monthly gift of this amount would add up over one year to pay for one operation to correct a cleft condition

Title First Name
Surname
Address
 Postcode
Email

Please give your email if you are happy to hear about our work in this way. You will be free to unsubscribe at any time.

Please send me information about leaving a legacy to Operation Smile in my Will.

If you no longer wish to hear from us, please call 020 3475 5126 or email: info@operationsmile.org.uk

Make your gift go further at no extra cost.

The Government's Gift Aid scheme allows us to reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 you give Operation Smile – at no extra cost to you. All you need to do is tick this box: I am a UK taxpayer and would like to Gift Aid all donations I have made to Operation Smile in the last four years and all donations I make in the future, until I notify you otherwise*. I am not a UK taxpayer.

*I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax for the current tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax claimed on all donations in the tax year, otherwise I will be responsible to pay any difference. I understand that Operation Smile will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I have given. Date ___/___/___

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit.



Originator's ID Number

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society branch

To the manager of the

Name(s) of Account Holder(s)

Bank Address

Postcode

Branch Sort Code

Bank or Building Society Account Number

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society:

Please pay Operation Smile UK Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Operation Smile UK and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

On what day of the month would you like to pay your monthly Direct Debit?

1st 15th (please tick preference)

Signature

Today's date

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions from some types of accounts.

Please complete and send this form to: Operation Smile UK, 10 The Broadway, London SW19 1RF

Honduras and Guatemala

Finding those in need



Don Alex Guerrero finding and helping Greth Liseth and son Erick Manuel.

Planned Mission Schedule for 2018

9–17 February	Philippines	Cebu
10–19 February	India	Bangalore
15–24 February	Honduras	Tegucigalpa
1 March	Paraguay	Asuncion
1–10 March	Dominican Rep.	Santo Domingo
4–14 March	Ethiopia	Jimma
15–23 March	Bolivia	Santa Cruz
24 March–2 April	India	Vijayawada
29 March–8 April	Malawi	Zomba
30 March–7 April	Morocco	Agadir
1 April	Honduras	Comayagua
5–16 April	Ghana	TBD–Ho
6–15 April	Madagascar	TBD Multisite
11–21 April	Mexico	Chiapas
16 April–4 May	Rwanda	Rwinkwavu
1 May	Myanmar	TBD
1 May	Nicaragua	Managua
1 May	Philippines	TBD
5–13 May	Peru	Lima
1 June	Honduras	Choluteca
1 June	Morocco	Agadir
19–28 June	India	Durgapur
20–30 June	Mexico	Monterrey

2017 was a remarkable year for Operation Smile – not only have we celebrated 35 years, but we were also able to announce the eradication of the backlog of cleft conditions in Honduras.

Along with the Honduran Ministry of Health, we have managed to find and to heal all those who were living with an unrepaired cleft condition. Alongside this, through our capacity building efforts, we have been able to upskill the health workers in the country so that they are now able to take care of the new birth rate themselves. It is a remarkable achievement that Operation Smile are now replicating in neighbouring Guatemala. Both countries face similar issues surrounding poverty and lack of access to healthcare; however we will use the 20 years of experience that we gained in Honduras, to effectively reach all those waiting for surgery in Guatemala as well.

One of the largest challenges that we face is finding those who need our help. It was our unique utilisation of patient advocates like Don Alex in Honduras that enabled us to undertake this enormous task. In one district alone, our patient advocate located 47 patients who had been hidden from our traditional patient recruitment techniques. We saw that through the use of patient advocates, the average age of patients coming forward to our missions was higher, whilst the spectrum of oldest and youngest patients also increased. These factors indicate a greater reach within the community.

To have eradicated cleft in Honduras was a proud moment for Operation Smile, but we know that there are hundreds of thousands of people around the world who are without surgical care. **Using our 35 years of experience, and learnings from countries such as Honduras, we are more determined than ever to achieve our ambition to find and treat all those who need our help.**

Get involved

Community Hub – it's all because of you!



BE PART OF A NATIONAL COMMUNITY

MEET NEW PEOPLE
LEARN NEW SKILLS & SHARE EXPERIENCES

6,000+ SUPPORTERS IN THE UK
JOIN OUR SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS

HELP CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD

WORK WITH OVER **100**

GET INVOLVED IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS IN OUR SPEAKER NETWORK

LEARN MORE ABOUT **OUR PROGRAMMES**

We recognise the incredible work our supporters do and wanted to provide something that helped connect them at a local level. So, we have launched our new online **Community Hub**. The Hub is a way of bringing together local communities that provides useful fundraising resources, ideas and information on how anyone can get involved at a local level. **YOU** can discover more ways to support Operation Smile with the click of a button at operationsmile.org.uk/community. Your action will continue to help raise smiles around the world.

Smile Tea 2017

Last September Operation Smile welcomed more than 100 supporters to London to celebrate achievements of the past 12 months, meet with other members of the UK community and to hear about the local activities we are running throughout the UK. It was a great opportunity to hear how the amazing efforts our supporters give towards Operation Smile is helping those affected with cleft all around the world. **A huge thank you to all our supporters – we look forward to holding our next event in spring 2018! Contact events.uk@operationsmile.org for more info or visit the Community Hub!**



Carols by Candlelight 2017



December saw more than 250 guests attend Operation Smile's Carols By Candlelight raising more than £5,000! The event is our way of thanking everyone who had supported us over the years and brought us all together for a very special night. Thank you all for being part of this 35th celebration with us and for helping us start our 36th year off with a swing!

Do something different with your summer



Looking to fill those long summer months? Want to meet people from all over the world, develop personal skills and learn more about a major international charity? The International Student Leadership Conference is the perfect place for you! Operation Smile's ISLC, Seattle, Washington, USA 16th – 22nd July 2018. Spaces are limited so read more and register your interest today! studentprograms.operationsmile.org/islc2018/

Visit www.operationsmile.org.uk/events or call us on 020 3475 5126 for more info!